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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 004563

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SUBJECT: TURKEY'S SUPREME MILITARY COUNCIL MEETING PRODUCES
FEW SURPRISES

REF: ANKARA 4409

Classified By: Political-Military Counselor Timothy A. Betts, reasons 1
. 4 (b,d)

1. (C) SUMMARY: The Turkish General Staff (TGS) announced on August 4 the decisions made by the Supreme Military Council (Yuksekk Askeri Surasi - YAS) at its August 1-4 meeting, during which the promotion, retirement and re-assignment of Turkey's senior military officers, as well as the dismissal of military personnel for violations of "military discipline" were decided. The announcements provided few surprises, with many of the changes following a predictable pattern of succession. Only the selection of Aegean Army Commander LTG Kosaner to succeed GEN Basbug as Deputy Chief of Staff (DCHOD) was not expected. Kosaner's appointment is considered a positive move. END SUMMARY.

PREDICTABLE SUCCESSION

2. (SBU) The 16-member YAS, composed of all 14 four-star generals and admirals, the Minister of Defense and the Prime Minister, held its annual meeting to decide the fate of Turkey's senior officer corps and to dismiss those NCOs and officers for violations of "military discipline" (normally meaning suspicion of having Islamic fundamentalist tendencies inconsistent with secular ideology of Ataturk's military.) All decisions will become effective on August 30.

3. (U) This year's YAS meeting produced no big surprises, with many of the movements following a traditional pattern of succession (see reftel). Turkish Air Forces Commander GEN Ibrahim Firtina, Naval Forces Commander ADM Ozlem Ornek and First Army Commander GEN Hursit Tolon (Note: Tolon has been publicly critical of US actions in Iraq. End Note.) completed their allotted four years in service and were retired. As expected, Firtina will be succeeded by War Academies GEN Faruk Comert; ADM Ornek by Fleet Commander ADM Yener Karahanoglu; and Tolon by DCHOD Ilker Basbug.

NEW DCHOD RELATIVELY UNKNOWN

4. (C) Despite significant speculation over the successor for DCHOD Ilker Basbug, TGS managed to keep a tight lid on the decision. The most often repeated name had been National Military Representative to NATO LTG Ergin Saygun, popular both within TGS and with his array of US military contacts. Aegean Army Commander Sebahattin Isik Kosaner, Fifth Corps Commander LTG Hasan Igsiz and (less frequently) MND Under Secretary LTG Atila Isik were also mentioned as contenders.

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In the last few days, LTG Aydogan Baboglu was also in the running, according to press reports. The selection of Kosaner, while not expected, is not unwelcome. Not viewed as being as charismatic or informal as Saygun, Kosaner is considered a traditional military officer who keeps his counsel and will take his lead from CHOD Ozkok, who will retire in 2006. Given Kosaner's age and the mandatory 65 year retirement age, it is unlikely that he will become CHOD. LTG Saygun did receive his fourth star and will take over for Kosaner as Aegean Army Commander. Because he was passed over for the DCHOD position, he will not have time to march the traditional path to TGS Chief from First Army Commander and Land Forces Commander in his four remaining years in service.

OUT WITH THE ISLAMISTS

5. (C) Consistent with past years, the YAS dismissed some NCOs and officers for behavior considered inconsistent with Turkish military ideology. The numbers have ranged from hundreds of dismissals over the past decade, to a dozen or so in recent years. This year eleven were dismissed for behavior perceived to be fundamentalist, i.e., attending Mosque in uniform; marrying a woman who wears a head scarf, etc.. The dismissals come after a process of counseling and warnings that go unheeded. If past years are a guide, PM Erdogan will issue a statement expressing his disagreement with this process.

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